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ENTITLED

SMART-CACHING SYSTEM AND METHOD

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

BE IT KNOWN THAT Alexandre K. Shah of 4222 Cordobes Cove, San Diego, 92130, invented certain new and useful improvements entitled as set forth above of which the following is a specification:

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3 SMART-CACHING SYSTEM AND METHOD

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5 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

6 (1) Field of the Invention

7 The present invention relates generally to expedited data  
8 retrieval and processing, and more particularly to efficient  
9 caching techniques.

10 (2) Description of the Prior Art

11 A cache is commonly known as a memory or another type of  
12 storage device, utilized to store data on a temporary basis. The  
13 degree of the term "temporary" can vary widely depending upon the  
14 application and configuration of a system utilizing the cache.  
15 For example, for an internet user utilizing a personal computer  
16 (PC) to browse the internet, web pages requested by the user are  
17 retrieved from an original server on the internet, and thereafter  
18 often stored in the user's internet browser's cache directory on  
19 the user PC's hard disk. By utilizing a cache to store requested  
20 internet web pages, subsequent requests for the same web page can  
21 be processed by retrieving the web page from the cache rather  
22 than the original server, hence relieving the internet of  
23 additional traffic and providing a more rapid response to the  
24 user.

1           The term "cache memory" often refers to random access memory  
2           (RAM) that a computer microprocessor can access more quickly than  
3           typical RAM. Alternately, "disk cache" is intended to improve  
4           the speed for writing and reading to/from a storage device such  
5           as a hard drive, and disk cache can be part of the hard disk, or  
6           a specified portion of RAM. In some systems where internet  
7           accessibility, connectivity, and content requests are prevalent,  
8           caching can be implemented across multiple servers wherein the  
9           server caches are periodically refreshed.

10          Caches can be implemented at the user level to serve a  
11          specific user, or caches can be designed to serve larger  
12          combinations of user. For example, macro caches can be  
13          designated on systems serving international, national, regional,  
14          or organizational users to preserve, periodically update, and  
15          make available for distribution, information anticipated to be  
16          highly requested by users of the system. Similarly, local server  
17          caches can be designed for corporate LANs, access provider  
18          servers, etc., for example, to similarly cache information  
19          determined to be more popular at a more localized level.

20          As the popularity of the internet increases, the need for  
21          more efficient caching is desired to decrease processing times  
22          and bandwidth demands on the internet.

There is currently not an efficient method of caching information that can be easily adapted for the increasing demands provided by systems or networks such as the internet.

What is needed is a system and method for efficient caching.

## SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

This disclosure reveals methods and systems for responding to a request for information using software processes or threads, otherwise referred to herein as VGENs. In an embodiment, the request for information can be a HTTP request as received through a network such as the internet, however the invention herein is not limited to such an embodiment, and requests can be processed through other networks or non-networked environments. Similarly, requests other than HTTP requests can be processed.

In an embodiment wherein the request includes a Uniform Resource Location (URL), the URL can be used to generate a key that provides an index to a hash table. The hash table establishes relationships between requests or corresponding keys and any software threads that have previously processed those requests or corresponding keys.

In an embodiment, the software threads, or VGENs, are capable of being modified by incorporating application code into the software thread. Similarly, application code within a

1 software thread can be updated to a latest version to provide  
2 uninterrupted processing of requests.

3 In an embodiment wherein a hash table is used to relate a  
4 key from a URL to a software thread, if none of the software  
5 threads have processed a request according to the key, a software  
6 thread is used that corresponds to the non-processing software  
7 thread that has been in a non-processing state for the longest  
8 period of time when compared to other non-processing threads.  
9 Alternately, if one or multiple software threads are identified  
10 through the hash table as having processed a request according to  
11 the key, the non-processing identified thread that has been in a  
12 non-processing state for the longest time is selected.

13 When a VGEN or software thread is selected to process a  
14 particular request for a first time, the software thread can  
15 retrieve application code to process the request, byte-compile  
16 the code, and incorporate the code into the software thread. If  
17 persistent connections to databases, real-time data sources, file  
18 systems, session manager daemons, etc., facilitate processing the  
19 request, the software thread can establish and maintain such  
20 persistent connections for future processing requests. The  
21 software thread can also retrieve data from these persistent  
22 connections, optionally process it to a more rapidly accessible  
23 form and store it into the thread's local memory. This is  
24 sometimes referred to as localized caching. Alternately, during

1 subsequent requests for processing, a VGEN can compare the VGEN's  
2 byte-compiled version of code for a given request to an off-line  
3 repository for storing application code, to determine the latest  
4 version of application code. If the off-line code is a new  
5 version, the VGEN can retrieve, byte-compile, and incorporate the  
6 new code accordingly. The off-line repository can be any memory  
7 device or device that includes a memory, is accessible to the  
8 software thread, and capable of storing application code.

The VGENs can reside on a server or other processor that receives a request, or the VGENs can reside on other processor-based machines or servers that are not responsible for receiving the request. A request received by one server can thus be propagated to one or multiple other servers for processing by VGENs.

Other objects and advantages of the invention will become obvious hereinafter in the specification and drawings.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A more complete understanding of the invention and many of the attendant advantages thereto will be readily appreciated as the same becomes better understood by reference to the following detailed description when considered in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein like reference numerals refer to like parts and wherein:

1           FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a system practicing the basic  
2       principles of the invention for implementing VGEN engines in a  
3       web server embodiment;

4           FIG. 2 shows a block diagram illustrating the updating of  
5       application code in a VGEN;

6           FIG. 3 demonstrates two embodiments of VGEN engines in  
7       accordance with a system according to FIG. 1;

8           FIG. 4 illustrates a system in accordance with FIGS. 1 and  
9       3, wherein a request from a web server is processed by a VGEN  
10      engine;

11       FIG. 5 is shows a hash table for utilization by a system  
12      according to FIG. 4, wherein VGEN engines can be identified  
13      through URL keys;

14       FIG. 6 provides a logic block diagram demonstrating the  
15      selection of a VGEN engine for a system in accordance with FIGS.  
16      1, 3, and 4.

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18           DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATED EMBODIMENTS

19       To provide an overall understanding of the invention,  
20      certain illustrative embodiments will now be described; however,  
21      it will be understood by one of ordinary skill in the art that  
22      the systems and methods described herein can be adapted and  
23      modified to provide systems and methods for other suitable

1 applications and that other additions and modifications can be  
2 made to the invention without departing from the scope hereof.

3 For the purposes of the disclosure herein, a "server" can be  
4 understood to include a processor, a memory (e.g. RAM), a bus to  
5 couple the processor and the memory, a mass storage device (e.g.  
6 a magnetic or optical disk) coupled to the processor and the  
7 memory through an I/O controller, and a network interface coupled  
8 to the processor and the memory. The servers may further include  
9 one or more mass storage devices such as a disk farm or a  
10 redundant array of independent disks ("RAID") system for  
11 additional storage and data integrity. Read-only devices, such  
12 as compact disk drives and digital versatile disk drives, may  
13 also be connected to the servers. Servers can be understood to  
14 be, for example, personal computers (PCs), SUN workstations,  
15 handheld, palm, laptop, or other microprocessor controlled  
16 devices for performing the operations and functions as described  
17 herein and attributed to servers. Servers can be connected via  
18 networks for more efficient processing of client traffic.  
19 Servers in stand-alone or network configurations can operate  
20 together or independently for different functions, wherein a  
21 server can be designated a database server, an application  
22 server, a web server, etc. As used herein, the term "server" is  
23 intended to refer to any of the above-described servers that  
24 further includes instructions for causing the server processor to

1 perform the functions designated and attributed to the servers  
2 herein.

3 Referring now to FIG. 1, there is a block diagram 10 of a  
4 system practicing the basic principles of the invention for  
5 implementing VGEN engines in a web server embodiment. Although  
6 the illustrated embodiments of the methods and systems can be  
7 interpreted with respect to a networked environment such as the  
8 internet, those with ordinary skill in the art will recognize  
9 that the methods and systems are not limited to an internet  
10 application and can be applied to any method or system  
11 implementing caching techniques. In the exemplary internet  
12 embodiment of FIG. 1, any one of well-known internet browsers  
13 executing on a client 12, can execute a command to retrieve  
14 requested information, including for example, a web document, web  
15 page, content information, etc., wherein the information is  
16 retrieved from a specified internet address that corresponds to,  
17 in the illustrated embodiment, a web server 14. In an  
18 embodiment, the illustrated client 12 can be a server as defined  
19 previously herein. As is well-known in the art, the requested  
20 information can be displayed or otherwise presented to a user of  
21 the client 12 via a viewing device such as a display, screen,  
22 etc., that is otherwise integrated with the client 12. In the  
23 internet embodiment, user requests for information can be  
24 executed via the browser on the client 12 wherein the browser

1 provides an interface for the user to designate a Uniform  
2 Resource Location (URL) and cause the browser to execute an  
3 Hyper-Text Transfer Protocol (HTTP) request to the web server 14,  
4 wherein in the illustrated embodiment, the illustrated web server  
5 14 corresponds to the URL designated by the user. The web server  
6 14 responds to the http request by transmitting the requested  
7 information to the client 12. Those with ordinary skill in the  
8 art will recognize that the retrieved information can be in the  
9 form of an HTTP object that includes plain text (ASCII)  
10 conforming to the HyperText Markup Language ("HTML"), Dynamic  
11 HyperText Markup Language ("DHTML"), Extensible Markup Language  
12 ("XML"), the Extensible Hypertext Markup Language ("XHML"),  
13 Standard Generalized Markup Language ("SGML"), etc.  
14 Additionally, the retrieved information can include hyperlinks to  
15 other Web documents, and the web server 14 can execute programs  
16 associated with the retrieved information using programming  
17 languages such as Perl, C, C++, or Java. The web server 14 can  
18 also utilize scripting languages such as ColdFusion from Allaire,  
19 Inc., or PHP, to perform "back-end" functions such as order  
20 processing, database management, and content searching.  
21 Retrieved information in the form of a web document may also  
22 include references to small client-side applications, or applets,  
23 that are transferred from the web server 14 to the client 12 with  
24 the web document and executed locally by the client 12, wherein

1 Java is one popular exemplary applet programming language. The  
2 text within a web document may further include non-displayed  
3 scripts that are executed by an appropriately enabled browser  
4 using a scripting language such as JavaScript or Visual Basic  
5 Script. Browsers can further be enhanced with a variety of  
6 helper applications to interpret various media including still  
7 image formats such as JPEG and GIF, document formats such as PS  
8 and PDF, motion picture formats such as AVI and MPEG, and sound  
9 formats such as MP3 and MIDI. These media formats, with an  
10 increasing variety of proprietary media formats, can enrich a  
11 user's interactive and audio-visual experience as a web document  
12 is presented through the browser at the client 12.

13 Although the FIG. 1 system illustrates a client 12 and  
14 server 14 configuration, those with ordinary skill in the art  
15 will recognize that the methods and systems herein can be applied  
16 to a configuration wherein the illustrated client 12 can also be  
17 a server such as the web server 14 illustrated in FIG. 1. For  
18 example, application logic executed by a first server (e.g.,  
19 depicted as the client 12) having the same attributes and  
20 functionality of the illustrated web server 14, can issue a HTTP  
21 request to a second web server (e.g., depicted as the web server  
22 14), wherein the application logic can be executed on the second  
23 server to produce, for example, XML results. In this example  
24 embodiment, the XML results from the second server can be

1 transferred to the first server and thereafter to the initial  
2 requesting entity. In other embodiments, multiple numbers of  
3 servers such as the web server 14 of FIG. 1, can make requests of  
4 each other, wherein the subsequent server's results can be  
5 transferred to a requesting server. In different embodiments,  
6 the requesting and executing servers can be configured the same  
7 or differently while remaining in the scope of the invention.

8 Referring again to the methods and systems of FIG. 1, the  
9 illustrated web server 14 processes the request from the client  
10 12 using at least one VGEN Engine 16, otherwise referred to as a  
11 VGEN, wherein in the FIG. 1 embodiment, there are N VGENs 18,  
12 where N is a positive integer. The illustrated VGENs 18 are  
13 software processes or threads that can be executed separately  
14 from the web server functionality as such web server  
15 functionality is previously described herein, although a VGEN can  
16 reside on the web server 14 and be processed by the web server  
17 processor. Alternately, a VGEN 16 can reside on a server that is  
18 distinct from the web server 14 but can be in communication with  
19 the web server 14.

20 In the illustrated embodiments, VGEN processes 18 execute  
21 continuously and can execute scripts, run applications, connect  
22 to databases, etc. In an embodiment, a standard VGEN 16 at  
23 system initialization includes applications and basic  
24 instructions for executing tasks such as loading data

1       (applications, database data, XML pages, CGI scripts, etc.) into  
2       the VGEN 16, parsing data, processing applications, byte-  
3       compiling data, establishing and maintaining persistent  
4       connections, etc., although such base functionality is merely  
5       provided for illustration and not limitation, and those with  
6       ordinary skill in the art will recognize that other embodiments of  
7       VGENs 18 can include additional functionality or less  
8       functionality while remaining in the scope of the invention.

The illustrated VGENDS 18 can retrieve, cache, and distribute dynamic and other content, and generate requested web document ("page") information and forms. Those with ordinary skill in the art will recognize that the illustrated VGENDS 18 can be implemented in hardware or software, and in either embodiment, VGENDS can access cache memory, wherein such cache may be resident on the web server 14 or on another server, computer, etc. In one embodiment, every VGEN 18 maintains a connection to a dedicated cache area to increase system robustness, however in alternate embodiments, VGENDS 18 can share cache areas or segments. For example, a single cache area can be partitioned or otherwise divided for the number of VGENDS. In an embodiment wherein VGENDS process similar or identical information, multiple VGENDS can access a common cache area. In yet another embodiment, a common cache area can be replaced with the ability of each VGEN to access the cache of other VGENDS.

1           As indicated by FIG. 1, the illustrated VGENS 18 can also  
2           access Application Logic 20 that is typically located on memory  
3           that can reside on the web server 14, another networked machine,  
4           or otherwise accessible memory; and, the application logic 20 can  
5           include, for example, CGI Pages, XML Pages, Server Pages, etc.  
6           As mentioned previously, a basic VGEN 16 includes logic for byte-  
7           compiling applications, and therefore when an illustrated VGEN 16  
8           retrieves application logic 20 from memory, the illustrated VGEN 16  
9           can byte-compile and cache the application logic 20 into the  
10          VGEN 16 logic for subsequent, rapid execution of the application  
11          in responding to subsequent requests for the application 20.

12          As indicated in illustrated system of FIG. 1, the  
13          application logic 20 can be facilitated through a persistent  
14          connection with a database 22, real-time data 24, a session  
15          manager daemon 26, a file system 28, etc., although those with  
16          ordinary skill in the art will recognize that persistent  
17          connections can be maintained with other devices or objects  
18          without departing from the scope of the invention. The  
19          illustrated real-time data 22 can be provided through an  
20          input/output port or other source, while the illustrated file  
21          system 28 can represent the web server's file system, or another  
22          file system.

23          When an illustrated VGEN 16 byte-compiles application code  
24          20 and incorporates the code into the VGEN 16, the VGEN 16 can

1 maintain the persistent connections as deemed necessary by the  
2 application 20. As requests are obtained by the web server 14  
3 and distributed to VGENDS 18, the respective VGENDS 18 can  
4 aggregate byte-compiled application code 20 and associated  
5 persistent connections. By distributing the requests across the  
6 various VGENDS 18, respective VGENDS 18 can be requested to execute  
7 subsequent requests for respective application code, thereby  
8 providing an increased cache system without the disadvantages of  
9 continually compiling and caching application logic 20 and  
10 maintaining persistent connections to every data source from  
11 every VGEN.

12 The FIG. 1 system also provides a mechanism to provide  
13 updates to application code 20 without disrupting the web server  
14 in its ability to handle requests from the illustrated client  
15 12. As indicated previously, the illustrated VGENDS 18 include  
16 basic functionality to retrieve application code 20; however,  
17 this logic also includes the ability to verify application code  
18 that is presently byte-compiled within the selected VGEN 18.  
19 FIG. 2 shows a block diagram indicating a logic flow for the  
20 illustrated VGENDS 18 of FIG. 1 that allows for the uninterrupted  
21 update of application code 20.

22 As indicated in FIG. 2, when a request is received by the  
23 web server 14 of FIG. 1, an illustrated VGEN 18 of FIG. 1 is  
24 selected to process the request 100 as shall be described herein.

1       The selected VGEN can verify whether the application code 20 to  
2       execute the request resides within the selected VGEN 102, and if  
3       the selected VGEN does not include the application code 20, the  
4       application code 20 is retrieved from memory, disk, etc. 104,  
5       byte-compiled, incorporated into the VGEN, and utilized to  
6       execute the request 106. Returning to 102, alternately, if the  
7       selected VGEN determines that the selected VGEN does include the  
8       application code 20 to process the request, the selected VGEN  
9       retrieves information about the latest version of the application  
10      code 20 from memory, disk, etc., 108 and compares the newly  
11      retrieved application code information with the application code  
12      information from the selected VGEN 110. If the newly retrieved  
13      application code information indicates that the memory, disk,  
14      etc., includes an updated or more recent version of the  
15      application code as compared to the application code in the VGEN  
16      112, the newer application code 20 can be retrieved from memory,  
17      disk, etc., 104 byte-compiled, incorporated into the selected  
18      VGEN to replace the previous version of the application code, and  
19      utilized to execute the request 106. Returning to 112, if the  
20      application code in memory, on disk, etc., is not newer than the  
21      application code that is part of the selected VGEN, the  
22      application code is not retrieved from memory, disk, etc., the  
23      selected VGEN does not change, and the existing selected VGEN is  
24      utilized to process the request 106.

1           One with ordinary skill in the art will recognize that  
2           certain requests from clients occur with greater frequency than  
3           other requests; therefore, for the illustrated systems and  
4           methods, multiple VGENs 18 may include the same or similar  
5           application logic 20 and associated persistent connections to  
6           facilitate multiple and/or simultaneous requests for the same or  
7           similar information. Additionally, although the illustrated  
8           systems and methods retrieve and replace newer versions of  
9           application code 20 to update the respective VGEN 18, in other  
10          embodiments, multiple versions of application code can be  
11          incorporated into a VGEN 18.

12          Referring to FIG. 3, there is a diagram illustrating two  
13          embodiments of VGEN implementations in accordance with a system  
14          according to FIG. 1. As illustrated in FIG. 3, the web server 14  
15          can include a VGEN object 30 that thereafter includes a VGEN data  
16          structure 32 that maintains statistics for a VGEN 16. In an  
17          embodiment, the VGEN object 30 can be a thread-safe C++ module  
18          that interfaces with the web server's 14 high performance  
19          extension interface. In the illustrated system, there is a VGEN  
20          data structure 32 for every VGEN 16, but those with ordinary  
21          skill in the art will recognize that other implementations and/or  
22          structures can accomplish the same result of maintaining data  
23          related to a VGEN 16, without departing from the scope of the  
24          invention. In the illustrated system, the VGEN data structure 32

1 can include information based on the current processing status of  
2 a VGEN 16, the length of time a VGEN 16 has been processing data,  
3 security permissions for a VGEN 16, application code or data in a  
4 VGEN, persistent connection information, etc. In one embodiment  
5 illustrated in FIG. 3, the VGEN data structure 32 maintains data  
6 on a VGEN 16a that resides within the web server 14.

7 In another embodiment illustrated in FIG. 3, the VGEN data  
8 structure 32 can maintain information on a VGEN 16b that resides  
9 on a server 34 that is distinct from the web server 14. The  
10 invention herein is not limited to either of the two embodiments  
11 indicated in FIG. 3, and can include combinations of the two  
12 illustrated embodiments wherein some VGENs 16a reside on the web  
13 server 14, while other VGENs 16b reside on any of various other  
14 servers 34. Similarly, in the illustrated embodiment, the VGEN  
15 object 30 and VGEN data structure 32 can reside at locations  
16 other than the web server 14. One with ordinary skill in the art  
17 will therefore recognize in referring to FIGS. 1 and 3, that the  
18 system of FIG. 1 that displays the web server 14, VGENs 18,  
19 application code 20, databases 22, etc., as distinct elements,  
20 such display is merely for illustration purposes, and the  
21 elements therein can be combined and incorporated as part of the  
22 web server 14, or can be distributed across multiple servers or  
23 other platforms, without departing from the scope of the  
24 invention.

1 Referring now to FIG. 4, there is shown a basic methodology  
2 40 indicating the processing of a request received by the web  
3 server 14 of FIGS. 1 and 3. As FIG. 4 indicates, in the  
4 illustrated systems, the request is transferred to a hash table  
5 42 and VGEN engine list 46 that utilize information from the  
6 request. Referring now to FIG. 5, an exemplary hash table 42 is  
7 presented to indicate the methodology by which the web server 14  
8 of FIGS. 1 and 3 determines which of the various VGENs should  
9 process a request.

10 As indicated previously with respect to FIG. 1, the web  
11 server 14 can receive a HTTP request from the client 12 that  
12 includes a URL. The illustrated systems and methods can utilize  
13 the URL information in the HTTP request to generate a key 44 for  
14 the hash table 42 illustrated in FIG. 4. For example, a URL  
15 parsed from the HTTP request can have the general format of:  
16 http://host:port/path;params?query. In an embodiment, a hash  
17 table key 44 can be generated using, for example, the "path" and  
18 "params" values only, although such example is provided merely  
19 for illustration and not limitation. Once generated, the key 44  
20 can be related to one or more VGENs 18 associated with the key  
21 44. Although FIG. 4 illustrates the relationship between the key  
22 44 and VGENs 18 in tabular or matrix format, those with ordinary  
23 skill in the art will recognize that such relationships between  
24 keys 44 and VGENs 18 can be formulated using, for example,

1       queues, linked lists, or any other well-known data structure for  
2       formulating relationships or otherwise associating data elements,  
3       wherein such mechanisms can be utilized in cooperation with, or  
4       to the exclusion of, a hashing algorithm.

5       In the illustrated embodiment, once the methods and systems  
6       determine the VGEN(s) 18 associated with the key 44 computed from  
7       the web server's request, the associated VGENs 18 are polled to  
8       determine an associated VGEN 18 available to process the request.

9       Referring back to FIG. 4, VGEN availability can be determined  
10      using information from the VGEN data structures 32 related to the  
11      associated VGENs 18. Similarly, the VGEN data structure 32  
12      information can be provided in part from a VGEN Engine List 46  
13      that monitors the activities of all VGENs 18 and maintains a list  
14      of available (i.e., currently non-processing) VGENs 18. In an  
15      embodiment, the Engine List 46 is a doubly linked-list of  
16      available VGENs, although such embodiment is provided for  
17      illustration and not limitation.

18      In the illustrated system of FIG. 5, the VGENs associated  
19      with the URL key and identified by the hash table 42, are polled  
20      to determine an available VGEN 18. In the illustrated systems,  
21      the first available, associated VGEN 18 is selected to process  
22      the request, and the processing result is thereafter provided to  
23      the web server 14 for response to the client 12 as indicated in  
24      FIG. 1.

Referring now to FIG. 6, there is a block diagram 50 of the methodology to select VGENs 18 in the illustrated systems, for processing a request and distributing application code and cached information amongst the various available VGENs 18 to increase processing efficiency. As indicated in FIG. 6, for the illustrated systems and methods, a request is received from the web server 52, and from the request URL information, a hash table key is created 54. If the key does not exist in the hash table 56, a VGEN is selected from the top of the VGEN engine list 58. The hash table is thereafter modified to include the new key and selected VGEN 60, whereupon the selected VGEN is removed from the engine list 62, and the request is assigned to the selected VGEN for processing 64. Once the selected VGEN processes the request, the selected VGEN is returned to the bottom of the engine list 66 and the processing results are transferred to the web server 68.

By assigning VGENs to new keys, extracting from the top of the VGEN engine list, and returning the assigned VGENs to the bottom of the VGEN engine list, load balancing is achieved between the various VGENs.

Referring again to FIG. 6, if the illustrated methods and systems determine that the key is located in the hash table 56, the list of VGENs (or single VGEN) associated with the key are determined 70, wherein the associated VGENs are polled to determine the an available, associated VGEN 72. In one

1 embodiment, any such available associated VGENs can be ordered by  
2 time of last use or idle time, or some other designated criteria.

3 If all associated VGENs are unavailable, a new VGEN is  
4 associated with the key by extracting an available VGEN from the  
5 top of the engine list 58. The illustrated system processing  
6 thereafter continues by updating the hash table 60, removing the  
7 selected VGEN from the engine list 62, assigning the request to  
8 the selected VGEN 64, waiting for completion of processing, and  
9 upon completion of processing, placing the selected VGEN at the  
10 bottom of the engine list 66 and returning the processing results  
11 to the web server 68.

12 Alternately, if one of the associated VGENs is available as  
13 determined by either the engine list and/or the VGEN data  
14 structures, the first such available VGEN is determined to be the  
15 "selected" VGEN and is accordingly removed from the engine list  
16 62, the request is assigned to the selected VGEN 64, and upon  
17 completion of processing, the selected VGEN is returned to the  
18 bottom of the engine list 66 and the processing results are  
19 returned to the web server 68. Those with ordinary skill in the  
20 art will recognize that several of the processes as illustrated  
21 in FIG. 6, can be combined or otherwise interchanged without  
22 departing from the scope of the invention. For example, the  
23 processing results can be returned to the web server 68 while,  
before, or subsequent to, the VGEN being placed at the bottom of

1           the engine list 66. Those with ordinary skill in the art will  
2           also recognize that the diagram of FIG. 6 did not include updates  
3           between the engine list and VGEN data structure such relationship  
4           was previously defined in FIGS. 3 and 4, and thus the  
5           availability of VGENs as shown in FIG. 6 can be derived from a  
6           VGEN data structure of FIGS. 3 and 4 via the engine list that  
7           communicates with the VGEN data structures, or in alternate  
8           embodiments, VGEN availability can be obtained directly from the  
9           engine list. Additionally, the logic flow of FIG. 6 is designed  
10          to accompany an embodiment of the invention as indicated in FIG.  
11          1, and therefore the illustrative logic of FIG. 6 can be altered  
12          for alternate embodiments of the invention.

13           As the methods and systems of FIGS. 1-6 illustrate, the  
14          number of VGENs can be established (i.e., expanded or reduced) to  
15          facilitate the processing of requests according to system  
16          requirements. For example, if requests are being received  
17          wherein the Engine List 46 of FIG. 4 cannot accommodate the  
18          request, more VGENs can be added to ensure a list of available  
19          VGENs for all requests. As indicated previously, in many  
20          embodiments, there can be a likelihood that several VGENs can  
21          have the same information to process more popular requests. In  
22          some embodiments, each VGEN has a dedicated cache or section  
23          thereof, while in other embodiments, VGENs that can process  
24          similar requests can share cached information.

1       One of several advantages of the present invention over the  
2 prior art is that distributed caching of information can be  
3 accomplished for efficient processing of information to prevent  
4 an overloading of system resources that would otherwise occur  
5 without such distribution.

6       What has thus been described are methods and systems to  
7 distribute cached information for efficient processing without  
8 overloading system resources. In an embodiment, VGENs can be  
9 implemented as software engines that can reside on a web server  
10 or another server that responds to requests for information in a  
11 networked environment. A hash table can identify whether a VGEN  
12 exists with cached information to process the request. If an  
13 available VGEN engine includes the cached information, the  
14 available VGEN is assigned to process the request; otherwise,  
15 another available VGEN can be selected to process the request,  
16 wherein the VGEN is augmented to include the cached information  
17 and the hash table is updated to reflect the VGEN statistics.  
18 VGENs can maintain persistent connections to databases, file  
19 systems, session manager daemons, real-time data sources, etc.,  
20 to facilitate the processing of requests.

21       Although the present invention has been described relative  
22 to a specific embodiment thereof, it is not so limited.  
23 Obviously many modifications and variations of the present  
24 invention may become apparent in light of the above teachings.

1       For example, many of the elements of the illustrated systems and  
2       methods can be combined without departing from the scope of the  
3       invention. Although the illustrated systems utilized hash  
4       tables, other methods of relating a request to a VGEN can be  
5       implemented. The illustrated VGENs were implemented in software  
6       to access cache memory areas, however the VGENs can be  
7       implemented in hardware. Although the systems and methods  
8       utilized persistent connections between the VGENs and databases,  
9       file systems, etc., some embodiments may not require or utilize  
10      persistent connections. In some embodiments, application code  
11      may not be updated as was indicated in the illustrated systems.  
12      Although the illustrated systems and methods distributed the  
13      requests among available VGENs utilizing a last-used criterion,  
14      other methods or criteria for distributing the request or  
15      otherwise performing load balancing, can be practiced. For  
16      example, total processing time can be utilized to select an  
17      available VGEN.

18           Many additional changes in the details, materials, steps and  
19           arrangement of parts, herein described and illustrated to explain  
20           the nature of the invention, may be made by those skilled in the  
21           art within the principle and scope of the invention.  
22           Accordingly, it will be understood that the invention is not to  
23           be limited to the embodiments disclosed herein, may be practiced  
24           otherwise than specifically described, and is to be understood

1 from the following claims, that are to be interpreted as broadly  
2 as allowed under the law.